

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 288 324

EC 201 202

AUTHOR Murphy, Linda; Corte, Suzanne Della
TITLE Helping Your Child Learn Self-Care.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 9p.; For the 1986 issues, see ED 278 182.
AVAILABLE FROM Lindell Press, Inc., P.O. Box 462, South Salem, NY
10590 (\$18.00 per year, \$3.50 per issue).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT Special Parent/Special Child; v3 n2 Mar-Apr 1987

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Clothing; *Daily Living Skills; Dental Health;
*Developmental Disabilities; Eating Habits; Hygiene;
Normalization (Handicapped); *Parent Child
Relationship; Parent Education; *Self Care Skills

ABSTRACT

Practical advice for parents of handicapped children is the focus of this issue on self-care skills including self-feeding, dressing, and personal hygiene. Ten initial tips for teaching skills to children include constant repetition, modeling, and keeping verbal instruction to a minimum. The section on self-feeding addresses the topics of voluntary swallowing, chewing, hand-mouth feeding, good manners, praise, and dealing with negative habits. Tips on dressing and undressing give directions for teaching skills related to handling each article of clothing, as well as zipping and buttoning. Ways to facilitate the child's ability to practice and respond positively to personal hygiene routines (bathing, handwashing, toothbrushing) are supplemented by a section on good grooming for adolescents. (JW)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

Special Parent ★ Special Child ★

Practical pointers for parenting handicapped children

VOL. 3, NO. 2

MARCH/APRIL 1987

HELPING YOUR CHILD LEARN SELF-CARE

The three most important self-help skills your special child needs in order to lead as independent a life as possible are: self-feeding, dressing and personal hygiene. No matter what his chronological age, it is never too late for your special child to develop or refine his ability to take care of his own needs. Although most normal children seem to acquire basic independent living skills with little or no assistance, this is usually not the case with the special child. In this issue learn how to help your special child improve his self-help skills with a minimum amount of disruption to your daily routine.

Practical pointers

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L. Murphy

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

Before you begin, it's a good idea to keep these basic pointers in mind:

1. Most special children learn only with constant repetition! Once you adjust to this, chances are the frustration you might feel going over the same ground will be reduced.

2. Analyze the skill you wish to teach your special child by doing it on yourself s-l-o-w-l-y.

3. Examine each specific part of the task and figure out how best it can be demonstrated. For example, which hand goes where when pulling off a shirt?

4. Remember that most special children learn best if the activity is modeled, using the child's own hands as he is guided through each step.

5. Focus on one small aspect of each skill. Do not move on to anything more complicated until your child demonstrates he can do it on his own. Try not to get discouraged if your special child doesn't seem to retain what he has already been taught. This is typical of the special child! Backtrack to a simpler part of the overall activity. For example, if your special youngster reverts to dumping food out of his spoon, after he has learned the right way, go back to turning the spoon right side up for him. Hold onto his hand in the correct position until he catches on.

6. Keep verbal instruction to a minimum. No matter what the skill, keep in mind that special children become confused if too

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Linda Murphy, M.S., is the founder and for the past 15 years has been the director of a widely known, approved school for mentally handicapped children serving children ages 5-21 in Westchester County, NY, and surrounding areas. A lecturer, teacher and administrator, she is a foster parent and the parent of a handicapped child, too.

Suzanne Della Corte, M.S., for 15 years co-director of the school, is responsible for curricula, staff development and supervision. She is author of numerous research projects in the field and has edited psychology textbooks for a leading New York publisher.

many words are used. Get your child's attention, then **show him** rather than use lengthy explanations. Demonstrate on yourself first, have your child imitate you if he can, then practice by putting him through the motions, your hand over his.

7. Be as consistent as possible. If you are teaching your child how to drink from a cup, be sure to do so every day, even if there is only enough time for a sip.

8. Make all demonstrations as

normal a part of the daily routine as possible. Teach hand-washing, for example, when and where hands are usually washed, at the kitchen sink before meals, or in the bathroom after toileting.

9. Be flexible. If the method or activities you have chosen aren't working try something else.

10. Make sure your special child receives plenty of praise and hugs for his efforts no matter how faltering they are at first. Practice will eventually make perfect!

Self-feeding



All the muscles and movements of tongue, jaw, teeth and throat that go into feeding go into the production of speech sounds as well. The ability to **suck, swallow, close lips** are reflexes generally present at birth. Some special children, however, experience difficulties. If this is the case, you can stimulate the swallowing and sucking reflex by gently stroking your special child's cheeks while inserting nipple or spoon. Sometimes it's effective to place the feeding spoon on the middle of tongue, pressing downward very gently and making sure the spoon enters from the side of the mouth, rather than head on. Varying the thrust of spoon from right to left side aids swallowing and tongue thrust.

Your special youngster should be in as upright a position as possible during feedings as this reduces the incidence of gulping air or choking.

Voluntary swallowing. Although tilting your special

child's head backwards enables liquids to slide back on their own, this does not stimulate swallowing. Instead, position your child's head slightly downward. Make sure your youngster's cup has enough liquid in it so he can drink without having to tilt his head all the way back. Place the cup slightly behind the front teeth and on top of the tongue. Gently placing your fingers on your special child's chin will make sure his mouth will close properly and lightly stroking his throat will stimulate voluntary swallowing.

Your child's ability to hold his own cup will improve if initially you guide both his hands around his cup.

Chewing. Help your special child to chew by gently moving his jaw up and down for him. Start him off with semi-solid foods such as banana or soft bread. Don't scrape food into his mouth for him; if he is encouraged to suck food off the spoon himself he will gradually strengthen the

ABOUT SPECIAL PARENT/SPECIAL CHILD:

Special Parent/Special Child is a bi-monthly newsletter published by Lindell Press, Inc., P.O. Box 462, South Salem, New York 10590. Special Parent/Special Child is designed to promote effective family functioning between parent and special child. Bylined articles do not necessarily reflect the publisher's viewpoint. Annual subscription rate is \$18.00 per year. Send check to Special Parent/Special Child at above address. Reprints are available at \$3.50 per issue. Copyright © 1985. All rights reserved.

REPRINTS AVAILABLE

Vol. 1 No. 1 — Behavior, Part I

• effective discipline system • avoiding being too strict or too lenient • paying attention to siblings

Vol. 1 No. 2 — Behavior, Part II

• eating habits • bedtime problems • public behavior • facing guilt and denial

Vol. 1 No. 3 — Speech: Helping Your Child Communicate

• recognizing speech problems • when to get help • helping at home • managing stress

Vol. 1 No. 4 — School's Out: It's Time to Play

• playing with others • creative activities • choosing a summer camp • summer stress

Vol. 1 No. 5 — Getting Your Child Ready for School

• dealing with school personnel • the special education maze (PL94-142) • school phobia

Vol. 1 No. 6 — Focus On: The Family

• sibling and family relationships • support groups • finding help • holiday blues

Vol. 2 No. 1 — Understanding Psychological Tests

• how tests are done • what tests reveal • talking to professionals • questions parents ask

Vol. 2 No. 2 — Sex Education for the Special Person

• why parents worry • why sex education • helping your teenager

Vol. 2 No. 3 — Learning Disabilities

• what is LD • identifying LD • sources of information and help

Vol. 2 No. 4 — Home Is the Learning Center

• turning home into a learning center • parent-to-parent • grooming tips

Vol. 2 No. 5 — Behavior Modification

• bribery or punishment? • changing troublesome behavior • toilet training • special star chart

Vol. 2 No. 6 — Nutrition

• four basic food groups • sneaking nutrition into foods • the overweight child • nutrition and fast food

Vol. 3 No. 1 — Child Abuse

• what to look for • do's and don'ts • parent-to-parent • special children and drug abuse

Reprints are \$3.50 each. Bulk rates are available on request.

muscles necessary for chewing. Food that falls on your child's chin should be scraped off with a spoon in an upwards motion as this will stimulate his mouth to close.

Don't keep on pureeing or mashing your special child's food for him because it's too difficult or messy for him to handle table food. Insistence on soft foods is a life-long dependency habit. Introduce your special youngster to minute portions of solid food, especially something he really enjoys. Check with your child's doctor to make sure there are no dietary restrictions.

Hand-mouth feeding. The coordination of hand to mouth that seems to occur so naturally in others very often takes much longer for the special child. Don't get discouraged; just remember that each step of the feeding process must be broken down and requires much repetition.

- Have your special child practice hand-to-mouth movements by smearing sweet, sticky foods on his fingers; let him discover this activity by himself. Guide his fingers if necessary.

- Fill his spoon with foods he likes and then guide his hand to his mouth for him.

- Encourage your youngster to place the filled spoon in his mouth on his own.

- Show your child how to fill his spoon by himself by holding your hand on his and guiding him through the dipping motion. Try foods that adhere easily such as mashed potato, pudding, cereal.

As soon as possible substitute fork for spoon; use the same sequence to show your special child how to spear his food.

If your child lacks the coordination to handle utensils, consult

your pediatrician, occupational or physical therapist for sources of special tableware.

Good manners. Once your special child has mastered as best he's able the complexities of fork and spoon, don't assume that he can learn the use of knife, napkin and other elements of good manners on his own.

Try not to fall into the habit of helping your special child throughout the entire meal or having him sit and watch as you spread butter, cut his meat, pour his milk. Of course you can do it quicker and more efficiently than he, but it's best in the long run to get him to become as self-sufficient as possible.

Your child **can** master good manners if you continue to use demonstration techniques for each activity. The proper use of knife, for instance, can be taught by modeling. At first, **stand behind** your youngster and gripping his left hand with your left, have him spear his food with his fork. Hold your right hand over his right as he grips the knife. Make sure your youngster's thumbs are braced alongside the edges of the handles. Go through the sawing and cutting motions with him. Start with easy-to-cut food, such as hamburger. Make sure that the food is bite size before it goes into your child's mouth as this is also a good habit to get into.

Praise every effort. Your special child can acquire the ability to cut, sprinkle, pour, dab a napkin if you sit next to him, hold onto his hand and model the activity at every opportunity. Good habits take time and practice.

Getting rid of bad habits. Many special children have the annoying habit of touching other people's plates or sampling food at will. This often stems from the

special child's inability to discriminate "my plate" or "my food" from "his" or "theirs." Help your special child understand this concept by making sure he has his own well defined place at the table set with an easily recognizable cup or plate. Make sure to tell him that he can touch only the food at his own place setting.

The food in your special youngster's mouth should not be pulled out, examined or played with. Compliment him for "good swallowing" when he displays good manners. If he persists in food play remove him from the table.

Make sure your special child waits for everyone else to begin

eating and by the same token remains seated until everyone is finished. It might be a good idea to let him look at a book or hold a toy if he finishes first.

Your special child's ability to acquire table manners depends on your expectations. If you expect him to behave and give him plenty of practice and praise, chances are he will succeed. Do make self-feeding and good manners a priority. If your special child can accompany the family to restaurants without embarrassment or even participate more fully in family gatherings, it will expand the entire family's sense of enjoyment.

Dressing



Many special children have coordination or finger dexterity (fine motor) difficulties that impede their ability to dress, undress or fasten. Does your special youngster for example display any of the following:

- difficulty in looking at what he is doing
- difficulty picking up small objects with thumb and forefinger, or a weak grasp
- trouble standing on one foot, or shifting weight from side to side.

If he displays any of the above, it's best to take things very slowly. Don't expect him to master dressing overnight. Start with some simple activities, ones that you are sure he can accomplish without too much frustration.

Teach the last step first. Save the last inch of the zipper for your child to pull up; have him pull up his pants from hip to waist only. Try less complicated skills first. It's easier to first learn how to undress, then dress, and then final-

ly, use fasteners.

Always allot plenty of time so that neither of you becomes frustrated or pressured.

Undressing. Establish a routine by starting at the normal time you would get your child undressed at bath or bedtime.

Begin with your child's shirt. Have the shirt almost all off, except for one sleeve dangling from the wrist. Help your child pull the sleeve off. It might be necessary to first actually place his hand over the dangling arm and then pull at it for him. After you're sure your child can pull, start with the sleeve higher than the wrist length. Praise and compliment all his efforts. Continue until the shirt is half off and then finally introduce pulling the shirt over his head. This maneuver is impossible if your special youngster has physical limitations that prevent him from crossing his arms. If this is the case, avoid pullover type shirts. It will be best to purchase clothing for your special child with Velcro closures.





Remove pants in the same way. Have your special child seated on the floor with his pants half-off. Mold his hands for him in removing first one and then the other trouser leg. Gradually, with his pants further up to the waist, position your child so he is seated on his bed; have him then finish the task of pulling off his trousers.

Use the same step-by-step system for all other articles of clothing.

Dressing. Dressing is a far more complicated skill so remember before you begin to go through the motions on yourself. In that way you can simplify each step for your special child.

Pants. Start with pull-on, elasticized-waist jeans or pants. Pull the pants almost all the way up and have your special child complete the task.

Stand in back of your child and place your hands over his during the pulling sequence. Then, sit next to your child on his bed, put one of his legs in the trousers for him. Help him put the other foot in by himself. Next, have him put each foot in each leg by himself. Complete the sequence by having him pull up his own pants.

Shirts. Begin with the shirt almost completely on except for one sleeve. If your child even reaches for the sleeve (which you may hold out for him) reward him with praise. You can initially put his hand partly in for him. After your special child demonstrates he is able to pull his shirt all the way down, the next step is to have him take the shirt, and practice shaking it open. This generally takes a much longer time. Eventually, most children, given enough practice, figure out how to slip the shirt over their heads.

Stop at various points during the dressing procedure—leave

your child stranded to figure out how to finish. Make a game out of it. . .

"You can walk if you pull your pants up."

"You can see if you pull your shirt over your head."

"You can use your hands if you push them the rest of the way through your sleeves." Be positive, accept clumsy efforts and backward clothing. At all times show your special child how pleased you are with him for trying.

Fasteners. This is the most complicated part of dressing. Many special children don't have the finger coordination to learn how to fasten or tie. If this is the case, don't become alarmed. There are so many stylish looking clothes made today that fasten with Velcro tabs or that are made with elasticized or drawstring waistbands. "Special" needn't mean "unfashionable."

Zippers are much easier to handle than buttons. Attach key rings to zippers for easier grasping and pulling. Zip the zipper three-quarters of the way up and have your special child finish.

Zippering on his own. To keep the zipper moving freely especially during practice sessions, rub a wax candle or piece of soap over both edges. The easiest way to teach how to put the zipper in the track is to stand behind your child, place your hands over his and put him through the motions.

Buttoning. It's best to begin by buttoning all the buttons except one. Button the bottom button half-way so that your special child can see what he is doing. Help him by putting his fingers through the half-buttoned button. If it appears that your special child has gotten the hang of buttoning—go on through the motions to have him button two—but make sure he does not tire of the activity.

SOURCES OF HELP:

Special Clothes for Special Children
P. O. Box 4220
Alexandria, VA 22303
(703) 549-2640

Write for free catalogue of thoughtfully designed adaptive clothing and related items. Sizes XXS (20-30 lbs.) to XL (105-120 lbs.)

Programming for Parents
P. O. Box 408
Frenchtown, NJ 08825
(201) 996-2726

Write for introductory package with sample program. Step-by-step in-home programs to assist parents in teaching their special child cooking, laundry, self-help.

"Grooming for the Special Child"
by Shirley Flannery
featured in Vol. 2 No. 4 of Special Parent/
Special Child - reprints \$3.50 each

Personal hygiene



It will be a life-long asset to your special child if he becomes adept at all aspects of personal hygiene—washing, bathing, brushing and grooming. Being as well-groomed as others his own age goes a long way towards enhancing his social acceptability everywhere—at school, with his peers and to the world at large. Good habits take time before they become ingrained so it's best to start as early as possible. Most special children enjoy water play so that training your youngster to wash his own hands or bathe and brush should be less complicated to instill. You can make things easier for your child if you make sure to provide:

- an easily identifiable insignia so he can recognize his own toothbrush, nailbrush, comb, brush, washcloth
- a mirror at eye level
- a sturdy step stool so he can reach the sink or get into the tub comfortably.

Handwashing. The first thing, as with all self-care skills, is to **establish routine**. Show your special child the sequence of wetting, soaping, rubbing hands together and rinsing well. Although relatively easy to demonstrate, it takes **much** time to master this skill. If your special child gets into the habit of always washing hands before meals he will be sure to get plenty of practice and moreover will associate handwashing with something pleasurable—mealtime.

Bathing. You can begin by intriguing your special child by washing his dolls and toys. Have him watch at first and then allow him to "help" you. Transferring those skills to his own body should be easier.

Next, show your child the faucet and taps; mark the cold water with a blue sticker and the

hot with a red one for easier identification. Mold your hand over your special child's until he becomes accustomed to turning the taps on and off. The ability to regulate water temperature will take longer so don't become discouraged.

Teach bathing gradually. As you bathe your youngster have him wash first his arm or leg, increase this activity until he can wash himself completely. Make sure to keep checking those hard to clean places—ears, neck, nails.

Make (if you can't purchase one) a bath mitt out of two washcloths stitched together that will fit snugly over your child's hand. It makes soaping, washing and rinsing much easier. Always be sure to use a mild soap or shampoo, one that is designed not to sting the eyes.

Toothbrushing. Most dentists recommend children to begin to brush their teeth by age two. Start out by using a small child-size brush and use only plain water until your special child gets accustomed to the feeling of brush on teeth. Gradually introduce toothpaste one dab at a time. Many special children have sensitive gag reflexes so avoid too much paste.

Have your youngster make three sounds while brushing to make sure all his teeth are being reached:

"eee" front teeth

"ahh" back teeth

"ooh" backs of front teeth

An electric tooth brush which requires less physical manipulation is something to try if your child has difficulty making the correct brushing motions. Consult an occupational therapist if your youngster requires other kinds of specialized devices.

DO'S AND DON'TS

- **Do not discourage** your special youngster with negative comments such as "not this way, hold it that way" or "that's wrong."
- **Do remember that although it's painful** to watch your child struggle, let him attempt things on his own as much as he is able without becoming frustrated.
- **Don't expect your special child** to learn overnight. Give yourself and your child plenty of time. You can't expect good results if you are under pressure from school bus arrivals or other timetables. Save practice sessions for weekends, for example, when you are not as rushed.
- **Do quit while you're ahead.** End all practice time on a positive note, perhaps with a "review" of some activity your child has already mastered.
- **Do remember that practice will eventually make perfect.** What is more, you are giving your special child the precious gift of independent living.

Good grooming



The need for good grooming habits intensifies as your special child reaches adolescence. The desire to be like other teenagers is exactly the same, whether your youngster is special or not. However, while most teens develop a sixth sense about grooming on their own, picking up tips from each other, from magazines and the media, the special teen has limited opportunities for this kind of experience.

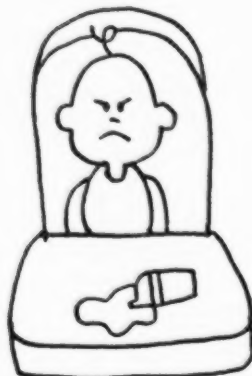
There is no reason why your special teen should not dress or look like others his own age. Perhaps you can enlist the aid of a sibling or a cousin to show your special teen how to properly apply makeup. A natural makeup base, light lipstick and blusher enhances the confidence of all young women, especially the

special teenage girl.

It's best to begin showing your special child how to apply deodorant **before** he or she needs it as it generally takes months of patient demonstration to master this self-care skill. Forming this habit **before necessary** avoids the risk of your special child offending others. A roll on type of deodorant is easier to learn how to apply. Demonstrate to your special daughter how to use a razor so she can safely shave legs and underarms. Light plastic disposable razors are easier to handle although some teens prefer electric razors. Although shaving very often requires ongoing supervision, the benefits of a well-groomed special teenager who feels self confident about himself or herself far outweigh the time it takes.

Readers ask Dr. Popper about self-care

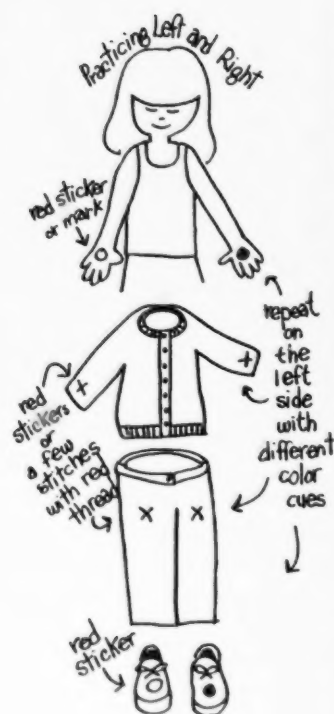
by George Popper, Ph. D.



Q. "Our five year old autistic son has developed a hand washing compulsion. He comes to me whining and crying to have his hands washed several times each hour. Sometimes it is only minutes after his hands have been washed. I have tried distracting him but he will then tantrum until I wash his hands. I am very disturbed and concerned by this behavior."

A. This is a common problem among autistic children who are often preoccupied with "ritualistic" behaviors; hand washing is one of many such behaviors. Since washing one's hands is a desirable behavior, you don't want to totally eliminate it. Rather, the goal is to control the frequency of the behavior as well as teach independence. To accomplish this, it is first necessary to get some measure of control.

Relenting in order to prevent tantrum is unwise and counter-productive. If a child—any child—tantrums because he doesn't get what he wants, then one might be inclined to say the tantrumming has been successful in the past and that is why it is continuing. Although this is often quite difficult to do, ignoring this inappropriate behavior and giving as little response to it as possible is one way in which it can be stopped. This might include turning your back and not looking at your son when he tantrums and perhaps even leaving the room until he stops (which in the beginning will probably take quite a long time). However, if done consistently, this approach has a pretty good chance of succeeding. The next step is to establish a routine to see that hand washing occurs **only** at the scheduled time. Let's



assume that your child hasn't yet learned to wash without help and let us also assume that he derives some pleasure from the physical contact with you. Establish a regular schedule during which time the washing will occur; before meals, before going to bed and after toileting are good times. There are many ways in which this skill can be taught and since your son already enjoys it, it shouldn't be too difficult. Make sure your son is engaged in some other behaviors between the times when the hand-washing is scheduled to occur. Reward him for participating in the **other behaviors** and for behaving appropriately.

Q. "I have a severe problem keeping clothes on my four-year-old retarded daughter. Anything I put on her she takes off, including her underwear. Not only am I afraid she will get sick in this cold weather, but I know this behavior will be totally unacceptable when she goes to school."

A. Several approaches are possible. For one thing, it is easier if your daughter's clothing is difficult to remove. For example, a one piece jumpsuit that can be secured from the rear, clothing made of strong material, buttons secured by heavy thread, etc. There is the problem that you want your child to eventually learn how to remove her own clothing in a more appropriate fashion, but this may have to be delayed until the inappropriate behavior is stopped. Using some sort of a reward or token system in which your child receives a "reward" for times when she's not tugging inappropriately at her clothing might also be helpful in attaining the desired goal. A qualified professional would be

needed to assist you in developing such a program.

Q. "I have a ten-year-old mentally retarded daughter who refuses to let me comb or brush her hair. Her hair is quite long (she won't let me cut it either) and she looks messy. Please help!"

A. How you approach a problem like this depends on a number of factors including your child's level of functioning, her ability to understand what is said to her, her personality and her emotional state. It is also conceivable that she really wants to do it herself and that the problem involves a desire on her part to be independent. All of these possibilities should be investigated. Let's assume, though, that her negative reaction is based on something that happened earlier in her life. One way of dealing with her behavior is by a procedure known as "desensitization." In a very general way the intent is to pair those things that are upsetting to her—the brush, comb or scissors—with something that is rewarding to her such as food, music or anything else she likes. So, for example, your daughter might start out just being in a room where the comb is in plain sight. If she is comfortable with this, it's moved closer until she can comfortably hold it. During each step, the reward (whatever it is) is given. Using this measured, step-wise procedure, she is brought to the point where she is willing to take the comb in her hand and comb her own hair. Take things very gradually. Make sure to compliment her on her good combing even if she does it only for a moment. Keep on pairing her appropriate behavior with verbal praise and rewards. This method works well if you are consistent and persistent. Good luck!